

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Public Safety and Security

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RECORD OF DECISION

IN THE MATTER OF

CHRISTOPHER VINTON
W62596

TYPE OF HEARING: Initial Hearing

DATE OF HEARING: April 9, 2025

DATE OF DECISION: September 2, 2025

PARTICIPATING BOARD MEMBERS: Edith J. Alexander, Dr. Charlene Bonner, Tonomey Coleman, Sarah B. Coughlin, James Kelcourse, Rafael Ortiz.

VOTE: Parole is granted to LTRP or CRJ after 6 months in lower security.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY: On May 1, 1997, following a jury trial in Worcester Superior Court, Christopher Vinton was convicted of murder in the first-degree for the death of Norman Poulin. He was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole. Mr. Vinton became parole eligible following the Supreme Judicial Court's decision in *Commonwealth v. Mattis*, 493 Mass. 216 (2024), where the court held that sentencing individuals who were ages 18 through 20 at the time of the offense (emerging adults) to life without the possibility of parole is unconstitutional. As a result of the SJC's decision regarding Mr. Vinton's first-degree murder conviction, his mittimus was corrected to reflect that his life sentence carried the possibility of parole after 15 years.

On April 9, 2025, Mr. Vinton appeared before the Board for an initial hearing. He was represented by Attorney Lisa Newman-Polk. The Board's decision fully incorporates by reference the entire video recording of Mr. Vinton's April 9, 2025, hearing.

STATEMENT OF THE CASE¹: On August 3, 1996, 20-year-old Christopher Vinton went to an apartment to sell crack cocaine, as he had done on several occasions. Norman Poulin (age 36) was inside the apartment with two other individuals. Mr. Vinton refused to sell the crack cocaine

¹ The Statement of the Case is derived from *Commonwealth v. Vinton*, 432 Mass. 180 (2000).

for less than his asking price. Mr. Vinton and Mr. Poulin then walked upstairs to Mr. Poulin's apartment to obtain additional money for the drug purchase. When they returned, an argument ensued. The dispute became physical. At some point, Mr. Poulin pinned Mr. Vinton against a door or wall. Accounts varied as to what happened next, but no one disputes that Mr. Poulin died as a result of one stab wound inflicted by Mr. Vinton.

APPLICABLE STANDARD: Parole "[p]ermits shall be granted only if the Board is of the opinion, after consideration of a risk and needs assessment, that there is a reasonable probability that, if the prisoner is released with appropriate conditions and community supervision, the prisoner will live and remain at liberty without violating the law and that release is not incompatible with the welfare of society." M.G.L. c. 127, § 130. In making this determination, the Board takes into consideration an inmate's institutional behavior, their participation in available work, educational, and treatment programs during the period of incarceration, and whether risk reduction programs could effectively minimize the inmate's risk of recidivism. M.G.L. c. 127, § 130. The Board also considers all relevant facts, including the nature of the underlying offense, the age of the inmate at the time of the offense, the criminal record, the institutional record, the inmate's testimony at the hearing, and the views of the public as expressed at the hearing and/or in written submissions to the Board.

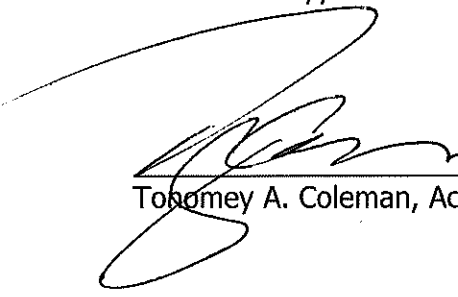
Where a parole candidate was convicted of first-degree murder for a crime committed when he was ages 18 through 20 years old, the Board considers the "unique aspects" of emerging adulthood that distinguish emerging adult offenders from older offenders. *Commonwealth v. Mattis*, 493 Mass. 216, 238 (2024). Individuals who were emerging adults at the time of the offense must be afforded a "meaningful opportunity to obtain release based on demonstrated maturity and rehabilitation" and the Board evaluates "the circumstances surrounding the commission of the crime, including the age of the offender, together with all relevant information pertaining to the offender's character and actions during the intervening years since conviction." *Id.* (citing *Diatchenko v. District Attorney for the Suffolk Dist.*, 466 Mass. 655, 674 (2013) (*Diatchenko I*); *Miller v. Alabama*, 567 U.S. 460, 471 (2012); *Graham v. Florida*, 560 U.S. 48, 75 (2010)). Since brain development in emerging adulthood is ongoing, the Board also considers the following factors when evaluating parole candidates who committed the underlying offenses as an emerging adult: 1) a lack of impulse control in emotionally arousing situations; 2) an increased likelihood to engage in risk taking behaviors in pursuit of reward; 3) increased susceptibility to peer influence which makes emerging adults more likely to engage in risky behavior; and 4) an emerging adult's greater capacity for change. *See Mattis*, 493 Mass. at 225-229.

DECISION OF THE BOARD: The Board concludes by unanimous decision that Mr. Vinton has demonstrated a level of rehabilitation that would make his release compatible with the welfare of society. Mr. Vinton was 20-years-old at the time of the crime and has become parole eligible after almost 29 years incarcerated. At the hearing, Mr. Vinton expressed remorse for his actions and displayed empathy. He began investing in self-development prior to the *Mattis* decision and the possibility of being parole eligible. He earned his Hi-Set and obtained his bachelors from Tufts University in 2024. He has been addressing his substance misuse. Mr. Vinton has been engaged in programming. He serves as a Graduate Peer Support Specialist for the CRA program. Mr. Vinton presented with insight at the hearing. The Board considered the evaluation of Dr. Herzog and notes that Mr. Vinton was low risk on her assessment tool. He was also low risk on the LS/CMI risk assessment tool. The Board considered testimony from four individuals, who spoke in support

of parole. The Board considered opposition testimony from Worcester County Assistant District Attorney Donna Marie Haran.

SPECIAL CONDITIONS: Waive work for 2 weeks; Electronic monitoring for 6 months; Supervise for drugs with testing in accordance with Agency policy; Supervise for liquor abstinence with testing in accordance with Agency policy; Report to assigned MA Parole Office on day of release; No contact with victim's family; Must have mental health counseling for adjustment; CRJ for at least 90 days; AA/NA at least 3 times/week.

I certify that this is the decision and reasons of the Massachusetts Parole Board regarding the above-referenced hearing. Pursuant to G.L. c. 127, § 130, I further certify that all voting Board Members have reviewed the applicant's entire criminal record. This signature does not indicate authorship of the decision.



Thomas A. Coleman, Acting Chair

Date

9/2/25

Date